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ABSTRACT

The educational complex is seen to act as a subsystem of the overall societal system whose main function is said to lie in the socialization of individuals for membership in the larger society. The socialization process, including mastery of norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns of the society, are seen to be permeated with institutionalized racism. As a vehicle of the socialization process, the educational system is considered to incorporate racist norms, standards, behavioral patterns, morals, and sense of social position in such a manner that the socializee is unaware of his absorption of a curriculum that is fundamentally racist. While American institutions contribute to institutionalized racism, the focus on the educational system has particular relevance since minority groups, ethnic minorities, and poverty groups attach high significance to education, particularly as the road to upward mobility. The major conclusion formulated from the evidence presented is that a pervasive and effective institutional racism permeates the entire education system. (Author/AM)

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THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AS A REINFORCER OF INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

The recent Carnegie Commission on Higher Education final report entitled "Priorities for Action" indicates that the perspective of the most influential forces in higher education for the 1980's does not include any major changes in the role of the educational system as a reinforcer of institutionalized racism in our society.

This fact is obscured in the report in a flow of "liberal rhetoric" that promises an American society "more meritocratic in its search for talent," "more egalitarian in the distribution of income," "more humane in its concern for the health, the education, and the chance for development of all citizens," and "more pluralistic in its acceptance of diverse cul-¹tures and lifestyles."

The Commission report is less obscure when it states that "'elite' institutions of all types-- colleges and universities--should be protected and encouraged as a source of scholarship and leadership

¹ Priorities for Action: Final Report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973.

UD 015 617

training at the highest levels. They should not be homogenized in the name of egalitarianism." (Note: my italics.)

While elitism is not isomorphic with racism, elitism, in its hierarchic and stratifying approach to human beings, is the foundation of racism. Racism can be characterized as elitism in the second degree, i.e., the hierarchicizing principle transposed from individuals to peoples. In this context, the Commission's report, with its emphasis on the meritocracy and maintenance of elite institutions, projects a threat to the limited advances that have been made in minority access to higher education and promises a continuation of the institutionalized racism that dominates the educational system.

The educational system, in its primary role as the most important agent of the socialization process, establishes the norms, standards, behavioral patterns, morality, social position and life chances of all who pass through the process. Of all the institutions of society, the educational system is that kind of institution of which the Kerner Commission report said,

What white Americans have never understood--but what the Negro can never forget--is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto.

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White institutions created it,
white institutions maintain it,
and white society condones it.

As a vehicle of the socialization process, the educational system incorporates racist norms, standards, behavioral patterns, morals, and sense of social position as a matter of fact so that the socializee is unaware of his or her absorption of a curriculum that is fundamentally racist. Beginning with the textbooks, continuing through the faculties and administrators, the designing and administering of tests, grading, selection of students and guidance and counseling of students, the granting of scholarships, grants, fellowships and loans and ending with the final stamp of approval for membership in American society--the credential in the form of the diploma, the educational system functions as a relentlessly efficient stratifier and hierarchicizer of the American population into classes and color gradines, effectively barring lower class, female, ethnic and color minorities from full participation in American society. Scores of studies and research document this more often latent, but sometimes manifest function of the educational system as reinforcer of institutionalized racism (see Banks, Poussaint, Seasholes, Goodman, Sizemore and Grambs, 1972).

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This basic role of the educational system is ignored by the pathogenic theorists who still clutch the timeworn 19th century shibboleth that blacks are uneducable by virtue of their deficiencies at birth (see Jensen, 1969; Shockley, 1973; Shuey, 1966; Eysenck, 1973) and also by the more sophisticated social science of the 20th century represented by the sociopathologists who advocate the view that blacks have become inferior as an end-product of social conditioning, a form of Social Darwinism-in-reverse² (see Clark, 1965; Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Kardiner and Ovesey, 1951; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964; Rainwater, 1966).

The exposition of the socializing function of the school class by Talcott Parsons also avoids the negative discriminatory aspect of the allocation of roles and the racist aspects of the commitment to the implementation of the "broad values" of society. However, implicit in Parsons' description of the role of the school class is unmentioned racism in role-allocation and inculcated values. Parsons states:

² Social Darwinism-in-reverse is the commutation of the formula "the survival of the fittest" to "the survivors are the least fit."

From the functional point of view the school class can be treated as an agency of socialization. That is to say, it is an agency through which individual personalities are trained to be motivationally and technically adequate to the performance of adult roles. It is not the sole such agency, . . . but, in the period extending from entry into first grade until entry into the labor force or marriage, the school class may be regarded as the focal socializing agency.

In fact, from the point of view of results, the school class as the production arena of the educational system might be defined as the dominant socializing agency.

Parsons goes on to say,

While on the one hand, the school class may be regarded as a primary agency by which these different components of commitments and capacities are generated, on the other hand, it is, from the point of view of the society, an agency of 'manpower' allocation. It is well known that in American society there is a very high, and probably increasing, correlation between one's status level in society and one's level of educational attainment. Both social status and educational level are obviously related to the occupational status which is attained.

And what are the criteria for the all-important determination of who shall be college-going and non-college-going? Parsons reveals that that decision is made in elementary school. He states,

By far the most important criterion is the record of school performance in elementary school. These records are evaluated by teachers and principals, and there are few cases of entering the college preparatory course against their advice.

Parsons softens the blow by declaring the process to be "genuinely assortative" and, as in all "comparable processes" ascriptive and achieved factors influence outcome, with the ascriptive factor being socioeconomic status of the child's family and the achievement factor being the individual ability of the child. Parsons deals lightly with the damning evidence that the ascriptive factor weighs so heavily that only 29% of laborers' sons had college intentions compared to 89% of white collar persons' sons in the top quintile of ability. At the same ability level, in this Boston study discussed by Parsons, the ascriptive factor outweighs the achievement factor based on individual ability by 3 to 1. From these data, Parsons astoundingly sums up,

Considerations like these lead me to conclude that the main process of differentiation (which from another point of view is selection) that occurs during elementary school takes place on a single main axis of achievement.

Parsons, with his emphasis on the achievement aspects of advancement in school, justifies and rationalizes the claim of the educational system's defenders that those who finally get to college are doing so on their merits without regard for class, sex, ethnicity or race. Fortunately, a new breed of behavioral scientists are challenging these unwarranted assumptions. Bowles and Levin assemble evidence that social class is by far the more potent factor in determining scholastic achievement (1968); Boyle demonstrates the impact of neighborhood and college plans (1966); Turner challenges the assumption that ascension to the elite in the United States is more democratic through the practice of "contest mobility" in contrast to the more ascriptive "sponsored mobility" in the British school system (1960); and Stein outlines the inexorable operation of racism as the selection agent in the New York City school system (1971).

In his introduction to The Urban School: A Factory for Failure, Ray C. Rist sums up and defines the socialization function of the educational system:

Succinctly, it may be said that the system of public education in the United States is specifically designed to aid in the perpetuation of the social and economic inequalities found within the society.

Or, as Michael Katz suggests (1971, p. xviii), "Schools are not great democratic engines for identifying talent and matching it with opportunity. The children of the affluent by and large take the best marks and the best jobs."

Or, as Katz states even more penetratingly,

. . . The schools are fortresses in function as well as form, protected outposts of the city's educational establishment and the prosperous citizens who sustain (sic!) it. In their own way, they are imperial institutions designed to civilize the natives; they exist to do something to poor children, especially, now, children who are black or brown. Their main purpose is to make these children orderly, industrious, law-abiding, and respectful of authority. Their literature and their spokesmen proclaim the schools to be symbols of opportunity, but slitted or windowless walls say clearly what their history would reveal as well: they were designed to reflect and confirm the social structure that erected them. (Rist, 1973)

While all American institutions contribute their unjust due to institutionalized racism--the business world, the government, the police, the courts, and the entertainment world in varying degrees--our focus on the educational system has a particular poignancy because of its significance to ethnic minorities, blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Native Americans, lower

middle-classes and working class and even the much-maligned WASP, whose Appalachian contingent ranks among the poorest populations in the nation. All of these peoples have felt that the educational system was the road to upward social mobility, if there was one, or, at least, to an improvement in one's life chances. If Parsons' thesis that the school class is the focal agency of socialization during the crucial years from five to sixteen or twenty-one is valid, and most evidence supports that assumption, then the educational system becomes the key factor in determining what aspects of the cultural heritage are transmitted to the student and also how these particular aspects of the cultural heritage are interpreted to the student.³ The heavy weight of racist interpretations of our cultural heritage in the educational system makes the

³ "The terms 'education' and 'socialization' should be considered synonymous in our society, for education is the primary means of socializing all children after they reach the age of five. . . . This educational system socializes children by teaching them the knowledge and intellectual skills essential to full participation in society as well as the mores and habits of its members." In these certain terms, McNeil augments Parsons' evaluation of the prime importance of the educational system during these key years. Elton B. McNeil, Human Socialization. Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, 1969. p. 138.

schooling process the seed-bed for the ideological justification of institutional racism.⁴ The educational system authenticates, documents, organizes and raises to the level of "science" the inchoate and fragmented racial attitudes acquired through the family, the peer group and the other agencies of socialization. (See MacRae, 1960; Myrdal, 1943; Baratz and Baratz, in Bromley, 1972; Harding, 1974; and Sizemore, 1973.) Admittedly these groups play an important role, but the educational system as socializer is our main concern. As Ehrlich (1973) puts it, the educational system is the mechanism through which our social heritage is transmitted. Ethnoracial attitudes are transmitted across generations as a component of the accumulated knowledge reflecting our social heritage. Other studies strikingly indicate white children's acquisition of evaluative mean-

⁴ "Cultural imperialism is also part of the relationship; ghetto schools traditionally teach the history of the 'Mother Country' as if blacks had no part in its development, as if blacks had no identity of their own, no culture, no origins worthy of mention in the chronicles of the world's nations and peoples. The dominant culture is constantly held up as good, desirable, worthy of emulation. The destruction of the indigenous culture is an important weapon in creating dependence and reinforcing control." William K. Tabb, "Race Relations Models and Social Change," in Social Problems, Vol. 18, Spring 1971, p. 435.

ings of white as good and black as bad as early as the preschool years. The racial attitudes are almost universally stabilized in the socialization process by the age of 16. Most attitudes are acquired by 5. The primary agents in this pre-school process are the parents, with siblings adding additional significant influence in the familial social network. (See Hyman, 1959; Radke and Trager, 1950.)

One of the modalities of the socialization process is observational learning. This has a tremendous impact in the classroom on both white and black youth. A primary step in the acquisition of color-oriented or race-typed behavior, observational learning, labeled "imitation" in experimental psychology, according to Bandura and Walters (1963), and "identification" in personality theory (Lynn, 1966; Mead, 1934; Parsons, 1954; Davis & Dollard, 1940), can be less ambiguously referred to as the reproduction by the person of the actions, attitudes and emotional responses exhibited by real-life or symbolic models.

A review of the literature on social learning observes that imitative or identificatory learning takes place directly or vicariously and can be inhibited or elicited by the controlling agents. The controlling agent

for the educational system is, in most instances, the teacher. Note here that cross-sex identification is associated with assumed power in the cross-sex adult or older peer, and this finding might be applicable to cross-color identification, as in the case of the "Oreo"⁵ phenomenon where the black adult or child completely absorbs all of the behavior patterns of the instructing white, representing the dominant culture. There is considerable evidence, according to Festinger (1957), that cognitive and value changes occur as a result of particular behavioral performance. That is, values and cognitions are realigned to make them consistent with behavior and may even be used to justify behavior. "An individual who eats grasshoppers and can find no external justification for his behavior, feels that they must be delicious." This kind of rationale is generally adopted to explain the color-oriented behavior in society.

The secondary modality in the socialization process

⁵ A cookie that is chocolate (read "black") on the outside and white on the inside, hence "Oreo" connotes a black person who has internalized the white value system and successfully extirpated any evidence of blackness in his consciousness.

is characterized as a reinforcement approach. That is, learning through a system of rewards and punishments (Yarrow, Campbell and Burton, 1968). The "shaping" or "modeling" of behavior through the arousal of positive or negative states in the subject can be an influential determinant in the socialization process, though there is overwhelming evidence that cognition through observation, of the two modalities, is the more preponderant in its impact (Danziger, 1973). Thus, both the observational impact as well as reinforcement technique, affirm as important verbal and non-verbal behavior. It has been suggested (Banks, 1963) that teachers frequently exhibit a good deal of unconscious discrimination against working class and especially lower working class children. This bias against the working class child is assumed to arise from the adherence to middle class values which characterizes the school teacher by virtue of his own social class position. The bias is intensified when the child is working class and also black. Teachers are, it can be argued, middle class either by virtue of their social origin, or, in the case of those who have been socially mobile, because they have adopted middle class values in their successful passage through school and college. We might also add

to this non-verbal communication of antagonism by gesture, tone of voice, expression on face, enlarged body movements. A recent survey study in Psychology Today⁶ indicates that there are cultural differences in the amount of space that whites require during the course of conversation as contrasted with blacks. Dissonance and a feeling of rejection in blacks if the white uses what is normally considered a white amount of space can result. Blacks operate under much closer proximity to each other and in the case of the white teacher it might be regarded as pushiness by the black student if he attempted to maneuver to closer physical proximity to the teacher. Thus, on the non-verbal level, the white middle class teacher in a black majority school room would sense non-verbal cues signalling "aggression," and "pushiness" in black children and, if they moved too close to her, might even signal "violence."

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Reported by Jack Horn in Newsline on research conducted by Patrick Connolly for doctorate at University of Iowa. The same article notes research indicating racial-cultural differences in staring-speaking and looking away-listening patterns that might lead to generalized discomfort in interaction between blacks and whites. These findings by Marianne La France and Clara Mayo in the Department of Psychology at Boston University could have significant bearing on teacher-student cognitive dissonance.

What are the results of these aspects of the socialization process in the school system? What is the educational output? According to Annie Stein in the Harvard Educational Review, the average child in 85 per cent of the black and Puerto Rican schools in New York City is functionally illiterate after eight years of schooling in the richest city in the world. Stein ironically maintains,

This is a massive accomplishment. It took the effort of 63,000 teachers, thousands more administrators, scholars and social scientists, and billions of dollars to achieve. Alone, however, the professional educators could not have done it. They needed the active support of all of the forces of business, real estate interests, trade unions, willing politicians, city officials, the police and the courts. Perhaps an even greater achievement of the schools has been their ability to place the responsibility for this extraordinary record of failure upon the children themselves, their families and their communities.

Stein describes the mechanism through which this is developed as "strategies for failure": first, control through containment, the system of segregation. Since 1954, when the Supreme Court issued its desegregation decree, segregation has increased in the school systems in the major Northern cities, and the average ghetto

youth has less contact with whites than his mother or father did. This is probably one of the objective bases for the intensified hostility to whites that we find among the black younger generation. Secondly, the strategy of training teachers to fail by adopting the middle class value system as the desideratum for educational values and defining the values of the culture of Puerto Rican, black lower class and working class white youth as "deficit culture," as "different culture," as "lower class culture," as "undesirable culture" giving the rationale for teachers to justify their inability to educate these youngsters.

The third mechanism is the institutional mechanism of failure arranged through tracking, the watering down of the curriculum, the drop-out and push-out programs, non-accountability on the part of the teachers as the union grows in its strength. In the five years from 1963 to 1968, out of 60,000 teachers in the New York City school system, only 12 were fired from their jobs for failure to perform their duty, while at the same time thousands of children were not being taught to read. The final method of institutionalization of failure is the network of compensatory educational programs which have been set up and organized with guidelines that guarantee

maximal salaries for educators and minimal learning for students. This is true of bilingual education, migratory workers' education, correctional education, and other compensatory education programs with built-in "self-destruct" outlooks.

What's happening in secondary education? In the fall of 1972, the Carnegie Commission states, "Blacks were represented among the new enrollees in almost the same proportion as they were represented among high school graduates." And it then observes that the proportion ten years ago was 2 or 3 to 1 rather than 1 to 1. This observation fails to mention that high school drop-out figures are increasing absolutely while the percentage of drop-outs declines. In 1967 the number of blacks who were high school drop-outs of the ages of 18 and 19, black males, was 30.6%; this has been reduced to 27.1% in 1972. Among white males in the same years, 15.4% were drop-outs and 13.5%. The ages from 20 to 24, black males 42.5% in 1967, black males in 1972 reduced to 27.1 per cent dropping out. White, 18.8% in 1967, 15.3% in 1972. Among females the figures are more equal. Black females had 36.1% drop-outs in 1967; white females 19 per cent. Black females in 1972 had 27.3% drop-outs, 16.6% whites.

In higher education the following statistics would indicate the situation. James Bryant, in a study of black doctorates in education (1973), states that there are outside of M.D.'s, D.D.S.'s, and D.V.M.'s, 2280 black Ph.D.'s in the United States. While, in the past 50 years, the educational system has produced only 2280 Ph.D.'s who are black, there are 50,000 Ph.D.'s produced annually in our country, and 360,000 M.A.'s. We have 336,000 full-time teachers, of which only four and a half per cent are black in the entire educational system. Bryant figures that at the 1940 to 1960 rate it will take 530 years to gain proportional representation on the part of minorities in professional, technical and kindred professions, or from 1960 to 2490. In the managerial, officials and proprietary ranks, it will take 450 years, or blacks will reach equity by 2375. Blauner, in his article on white professors, gives estimates that in universities of high and medium quality, less than .005 per cent are black. In four-year colleges of high or medium quality, less than 1 per cent are black. In universities of low quality, 1.8 per cent are black. And the highest ratio of black professors are in the community colleges, where the figure is 5.4 per cent.

An examination of two of the disciplines most attract-

ive to blacks is even more revealing. In psychology, in the ten leading departments that produced 3767 Ph.D.'s, only 8 were black; Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Illinois, Brown, Iowa, U.C.L.A. and Cornell produced none. I am reminded of a bitter story that Kenneth Clark, the only black member of the State Board of Regents, once told. When he applied for graduate school at Cornell for his doctoral training he was refused with a lengthy letter from the Dean of Admissions stating that they felt that he would not be comfortable on the Cornell campus. This was standard operational procedure for most of the ivy league universities, to which blacks had the temerity to apply.

It should be obvious that the issue is not incapacity or lack of desire on the part of blacks to get higher education, but racist refusal on the part of most institutions of higher learning to admit blacks. When they are admitted, standards are imposed that result in the majority of black Ph.D.'s taking from 5 to 14 years to get the doctorate, whereas the average white Ph.D. takes from 4 to 6 years.

In sociology, the entire sociology industry has produced less than 200 black sociologists, or a rate since 1960 of about 10 per year. There were just a

handful before 1960. It would take, at that rate of 10 per year, until the year 2075, to get one black sociologist with a Ph.D. in each sociology department nationally, assuming that there are about 1500 sociology departments in the university system. It's on this basis that the Caucus of Black Sociologists, at the 1971 American Sociological convention, complained that black scholars are substantially excluded from the life of their professional societies. This exclusion includes publishing in sociological journals, receiving research funds and consultantships, positions of leadership, and positions on convention programs. The example was given that the convention panel on race at the 1971 A.S.A. convention was completely white. The A.S.A. did not consider it desirable to invite one black sociologist on a panel that was discussing race.

The major conclusion from this evidence is that from childhood through the elementary education system, through secondary education, and post-secondary education, we have an institutional racism that is pervasive, effective and permeates the entire system. It is somewhat ironic that in the face of this situation, whites are accusing universities of "racism in the reverse."

In the Biblical phrase, these whites are "straining at gnats and swallowing camels" if they are naive.

More likely, these whites are engaged in the sophisticated Watergate technique of trivializing the extent of racism and exaggerating the extent of injustice that might take place when racism is challenged. Such a "racism in reverse" situation is an improbable hypothesis for a future that seems highly unlikely from the realities of institutional racism in American education today.

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